

Pedagogy against “dis-utopia”: From *conscientization* to the education of desire

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DRAFT

Not only does society, as it is presently structured, keep people immature but every serious attempt to shift it – I’m avoiding the word ‘educate’ deliberately – to shift it towards maturity is immediately met with indescribable resistances, and all the evil in the world at once finds its most eloquent advocates, who will prove to you that the very thing you are attempting to achieve has either long been overtaken or is utopian or is no longer relevant. What I’d really like to leave our listeners to think about is a particular phenomenon, which is all too often pushed aside in the enthusiasm which accompanies the desire to change things – that is, that any serious attempts to intervene in order to alter our world in any specific area immediately come up against the overwhelming force of inertia in the prevailing situation, and seem condemned to impotence. Anyone who wishes to bring about change can probably only do so at all, by turning that very impotence, and their own impotence, into an active ingredient in their own thinking and maybe in their own actions too.

Theodor Adorno (1999: 32)

Critical sociology and the possibility of possibility

In August 2007, over six thousand sociologists gathered in New York to attend the 102nd meeting of the American Sociological Association and discuss the possibility of radical social transformation in post-modern capitalist society.¹ The adoption of the conference theme ‘Is another world possible?’ was theoretically significant, for it seemed to call into question one of the most fundamental

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 102nd annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (New York) in August 2007.

¹ My characterization of contemporary (northern/western) society as both post-modern and capitalist draws on Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernity: The cultural logic of late capitalism* (1991) and David Harvey’s *Condition of Post-modernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (1991). It is also informed by Adorno’s (1968) insistence that such definitions are more than mere nomenclature, as they shape the choices we make about which theoretical categories are most relevant and appropriate for analyzing a society.

assumptions upon which critical sociology depends: that despite the rarity of radical social change, it is possible, desirable and even imperative to imagine and struggle for better alternatives to existing ways of being. From phenomenological insights into the contingency of our subjective interpretations of reality to the imperative of reconciling 'appearance' with 'reality'; from the long history of collective movements to defend human dignity to the 'politics of small things' (Goldfarb 2006), critical theories of society presume that human fates are not determined and futures are not reified, and that the possibility of possibility is a precondition for 'normal' human existence. This is not to say that progressive alternatives to the status quo are not often and everywhere repressed to some degree and in some form, or that they are equally distributed or attainable. But as Gustavo Gutierrez once remarked, a 'commitment to the creation of a just society and, ultimately, to a new human being, presupposes confidence in the future' (2003: 197).

The commitments of critical sociology also hinge on another, often less recognized assumption that the human condition itself is grounded in the existence or potentiality of a pre-theoretical and universal human *need* or *desire* to transcend, to self-determine, to be. Hence, while the project of struggling to create a better world is often framed as a problem of removing political, economic, cultural and psychological barriers to social change, for critical theorists it also begs questions about the social constitution of deep subjective impulses, the essence or contingency of 'human nature', and the possibility of educating people to need and desire differently than they presently do. The question of whether 'another world is possible', therefore, also communicates a new (and perhaps long overdue) ambivalence about basic sociological concepts of structure and agency, subjective and objective culture, and the definition of basic human needs and desires.

Furthermore, beneath the question's scholastic veneer lies a palpable fear that contemporary society is already becoming something other than what it has been; other, perhaps, than it appears to be; and other than what it might potentially or ought to become. Unlike the bold assertions of political activists that another world is and must be possible (de Sousa Santos 2003; George 2004; Skrimshire 2006; Tarrow 2005), the question of whether the claim is sociologically viable belies the anxiety of a profession alienated both from its own philosophical roots and from the people with whom it claims to speak. It is the anxiety that even if social scientists are able to develop the cognitive tools to

understand why these processes are occurring, we lack the confidence, imagination, relationships, means and will to interrupt or resist them. It is thus a humbling, almost despairing question, for it does not even go so far as to ask, 'can we build a better world together?' There is no obvious 'we', no unanimous definition of 'better', and a credible anti-authoritarian fear of imposing or presuming shared purpose where none actually exists. In fact, we now fear that even previous assurances were romanticized illusions – for example, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, orthodox beliefs in the revolutionary potential of 'the working class' not only homogenized workers but also mistook a need for security rather than a desire for revolution as the motivating factor for collective action (Jacobsen and Tester 2007). And although we are situated in the midst of a long and fruitful cultural turn in the critical social sciences, two perennial dilemmas continue to break ground: 'how to maintain social solidarity amidst the celebration of difference, and how to ground normative evaluation of action amidst the decline of cultural authority' (Jacobs and Hanrahan 2005: 1). The shift from asking how we can tactically effect radical social change to asking whether it is humanly possible at all, given the post-modern critique of enlightenment notions of 'agency' and more difference-focused definitions of freedom and justice, suggests a general decline of professional confidence in the sociological 'normality' of the possibility of radical social change.

I would like to suggest that it is also a manifestation of several wider dilemmas more specific to critical theory.² First there is the question of whether the analytical and normative projects of critical social science can be legitimately grounded in the absence of an empirically verifiable, 'quasi-sociological specification of an emancipatory interest in society itself' (Honneth 2007: 65). Second, the problems of *where* such a pre-theoretical, pre-pedagogical need or desire originates, and what its relation to the material structures of society might be, have not yet been satisfactorily resolved within the critical tradition. Third, the absence of an adequate theory of either normative judgment or human need makes it difficult to articulate and justify potential strategies of emancipatory action. And finally, the role of radical, critical hope in legitimizing faith in the possibility of possibility – the sort of speculative, normative, militant hope that is maintained in spite of appearance; which enables a style of critique that 'speaks against the facts and confronts [bare] facticity with its better potentialities' (Marcuse 1989: 64) – remains unclear and extremely contested. Hope thus

² For further views on the 'impasses' of 'post-Habermasian', 'post-1989' and 'post-9/11' critical theory, see Kompridis (2005).

appeals again, as Theodor Adorno once imagined, to its ongoing 'Court of Appeal' (Adorno 1951).

Critical theory and critical pedagogy: challenges in theory and practice

These dilemmas are gaining visibility in new scholarship about hope and utopia (Browne 2005; Crapanzano 2003; Smith 2005). However, in this essay I would like to illustrate how they are also taking shape in applied critical theory, specifically, in the current movement to rehabilitate concepts of 'critical hope' and 'utopia' through critical pedagogy (Ainley and Canaan 2005; Canaan 2002, 2005; van Heertum 2006).³ There are not only strong parallels between philosophical and pedagogical developments in social critique, but also unfinished pedagogical projects within critical theory itself. And while critical educators often ground their pedagogical work in the theoretical tradition, critical theorists have much to learn from the challenges that their philosophical work creates in politico-educational and cultural practice.

The critical education movement is conceptualized both as an 'educational dimension of the struggles within and against neo-liberalism' (Coté *et al.* 2007: 3), and more generally as a form of democratic political pedagogy (Jameson 1984; Giroux 2004a). It manifests in new ways a classical paradox of critical theory: that 'the forces that were to bring about the transformation [of capitalist society] are suppressed and appear to be defeated' (Marcuse 1989: 63), and more specifically that 'the forces of domination have rendered problematic the very possibility for critical thinking' (Aronowitz 1985: 119). On the one hand, educational institutions (universities in particular) are being dramatically transformed by the expansion of post-modern capitalist culture, the colonization of relatively autonomous cultural spaces by economic and bureaucratic logics, managerial control over professional and intellectual identity, and the reformation of teaching and learning as instrumentalized and commercial practices.⁴ It is

³ 'Critical pedagogy' is not a homogenous practice, but a label which unifies diverse and competing disciplines and practices. It includes, among other things, cultural studies, popular education, postcolonial theory, anarchist education, feminist pedagogy and autonomist Marxism. Here, however, I am interested in the conviction – shared across though not necessarily within the different traditions – that education can be a counter-hegemonic or post-hegemonic means of political agency (see Coté *et al.* 2007 for further discussion).

⁴ For more about the structural and cultural transformation of the academy, particularly in Britain and the United States, see Ainley *et al.* (2001), Ainley and Canaan (2005), Beck (1999, 2002), Crowther *et al.* (2000), Gaianguet (1998), Giroux (2004, 2004a, 2007), Gray (2003), Harris (2005), McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001), Ryan (2000), and

argued that these processes have taken hold within institutions of knowledge-production themselves; that 'the introduction of corporate standards and an external mode of scrutiny are changing the culture and ethos of the university' (Harris 2005: 428), perhaps to the point that the process is 'killing thinking', or at least its more radical potential (Evans 2005). There is a sense, therefore, that 'at a moment when higher education...is needed to focus on issues and help realise broad humanitarian goals, its vision and focus is being narrowed to meet utilitarian economic ends' (Canaan 2005: 76).

On the other hand, however, educational institutions continue to be viewed as sites of resistance to the very forces that make them into institutions of domination.⁵ Pedagogy is hence understood as a form of direct political struggle over the ideological construction of reality, and as a potential method of resistance to the bureaucratization, homogenization, instrumentalization, marketization and de-democratization of human need, desire and ethical will. This focus on the ideational and on deep subjectivity is qualitatively different from many traditional interpretations of critical pedagogy, which are more concretely grounded in the pursuit of '*conscientization*' in direct relation to more specific political struggles (Freire 1992, 2001, 2005). In this sense, critical pedagogy asserts that individuals' analyses of the social world mediate their existing limitations and possibilities. By reorganizing or 're-cognizing' their perceptions and cognitive maps, and by identifying both their 'limit situations' and the concrete actions that they can take to overcome them, people can become conscious of their pre-existing desires and will to transcendence. This in turn motivates them to undertake willed transformative action for changing their social conditions and engaging in collective struggle. Put more simply, it is a practice in which 'we listen to our students and support their efforts to articulate and

Thompson (2000). Specific concerns include (1) government policies to 'widen participation', with student numbers increasing by 88% between 1989 and 2002, while state funding decreased by 37% during the same period; (2) the erasure of public spheres and democratic spaces and the dominance of organised, programmatic and assessed activities; (3) the domination of neo-liberal languages and practices that frame academic work in terms of quality assessment, transparency exercises, best practice, indicators, competencies, audits, and outcomes; (4) the managerialization of the academy; (5) the commodification of knowledge as something that can be bought and sold rather than as a public good or social practice; (6) the intensification of labour for both students and academics; and (7) the disengagement of the university from radical social politics.

⁵ The meaning of 'educational institutions' can be broadly interpreted. Henry Giroux, for example, cites Stuart Hall's definition of pedagogy as being 'at work in all of those public places where culture works to secure identities; it does its bridging work negotiating the relationship between knowledge, pleasure and values; and it renders authority both crucial and problematic in legitimating particular social practices, communities and forms of power' (Giroux 2000: 354).

understand limits to their lives so that they can recognise and work to lessen these limits and those of others' (Canaan 2007: 74). In other words, critical pedagogy is often assumed to be an inherent source of hope because it disrupts and denounces the illusion of historical fate and liberates emergent utopian impulses through which self-determination is announced (da Veiga Coutinho 1974: 11).

But critical educators are now asking what relevance this understanding of pedagogy might have in a society where desires for individual transcendence and social change are or appear to be absent, devalued or denied. What are the possible consequences of *conscientization* in conditions where exposing complex power relations and dominant social forces emboldens fatalistic emotions rather than transforming them into hope; where, to paraphrase a well-worn theory, we see through ideologies and yet still buy into them? Or as Henry Giroux more poignantly asks – and here what appears as hyperbole must be understood in the context of contemporary American political culture and the moral indignities of Abu Ghraib – 'what resources and visions does hope offer...when most attempts to interrupt the operations of an incipient fascism appear to fuel a growing cynicism rather than promote widespread individual and collective acts of resistance?' (Giroux 2002: 38) What become of efforts to democratize knowledge when consuming publics democratically demand authoritarian teaching, or when self-realization is defined as the skilful adaptation to an existing order of things?

In such circumstances, 'critical hope' becomes a paradoxical problematic rather than an assumed outcome of critical education. If the *need* or *desire* for personal transcendence or social change is not taken for granted as pre-existing or immanent, then the object of critical pedagogy must either be to *create* them, or to create the conditions for their emergence. The aim of educating against the ideological forces of post-modern capitalism is therefore neither simply to recognize the social world, nor to create conditions of emancipatory communication. Instead, it is to produce the value orientations that make both of these activities meaningful in the first place.

Hence, the new movement in critical pedagogy prioritizes the ideational production of 'critical hope' as a motivational basis for transformative social action *prior to and outside of concrete political or economic struggle*, rather than beginning from it. Institutionalized critical education has become a project less in the service of particular political struggles and more an attempt to resist the

closure, privatization, apathy, and psycho-emotional 'coldness' that is presumed to abort political struggle at its immediate roots of subjective experience. Writing in defence of higher education as a key site of cultural resistance, Giroux argued that critical pedagogy is no longer simply a matter of 'raising consciousness' about the possibilities for realistic opposition, but a question of educating people *to believe* that these possibilities are worthwhile in the first place (1997: 28). This type of educational practice moves beyond cognitive rationality and towards the psychological, emotional and ethical experiences through which it is mediated. The question here is not only what makes it possible for people to rationally formulate alternatives to existing conditions, but also what makes it possible for them to *want* to do so. This reflects a turn away from the duality of 'reason and freedom' towards a more complex theory of social agency that includes its 'more-than-rational' and 'less-than-rational' dimensions (or in other words, the 'pre-theoretical' and 'extramundane' elements) of human action, as well as the social and emotional foundations of inter-subjective ethics (Ahmed 2004; Anderson 2006; Anderson and Harrison 2006).

In other words, contemporary critical educators are trying to produce through pedagogy a condition which, according to Honneth, is presumed to have been lost in the mid-twentieth century and yet which critical theory requires for its own justification: an innate, essential and indomitable need for personal and social transformation. This presents a familiar dilemma: 'how can we imagine these new concepts even arising here and now in living beings if the entire society is against such an emergence of new needs?' (Marcuse 1970: 76). Or, in the words of C. Wright Mills, we seem to have two choices when theorizing need and desire. On the one hand, he wrote, 'if we take the simple democratic view that *what men [sic] are interested in* is all that concerns us, then we are accepting the values that have been inculcated, often accidentally and often deliberately'. On the other hand, 'if we take the dogmatic view that *what is to men's interests*, whether they are interested in it or not, is all that need concern us morally, then we run the risk of violating democratic values' (Mills 1959: 194). In his habitually accessible way, Mills expressed the stubborn tension between socially constituted need as-it-appears or is experienced, on the one hand, and universal norms of need that may be abstracted from or alien to lived experience, on the other. It is this unhappy no-choice between the reification of immediate particular experience and the authoritarian imposition of abstract generality that critical theory must aim to transcend.

Before illustrating more specifically how this is being negotiated in movements for critical education, however, it is important to explain the critical diagnosis of society that frames and directs this movement. It is also important to understand how it is positioned within the broader theoretical project which explains how the dialectical relationships between social structure and individual subjectivity both reproduce and interrupt political domination. The next section of this essay is therefore devoted to explaining the thesis that a 'crisis of hope' has paralyzed political agency and social movements in post-modern capitalist societies, and that the geographical and ideological expansion of capital threatens to globalize both forces of dehumanisation and a pathological one-dimensionality of inter-subjective consciousness.

Post-modern capitalism – the 'end of social dreams'?

'What is crippling is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practicable.' (Jameson 2005: xii)

There are a range of theories now circulating to characterize this condition, many of which take the form of 'social pathologies'. I borrow the term 'pathology' from Axel Honneth to denote a specific genre of analysis which is not simply a critique of particular social problems (such as, for example, the decline of organized Left politics or the rise of privatized consumer cultures), but which rather aims to provide a general account of systemic 'misdevelopments' in individual and social character (Honneth 2007: 4).⁶ Although this approach to social analysis is often considered central to critical theory but antithetical to post-structuralist epistemologies, I would argue that in fact the rhetorical delineation of 'normal' from 'abnormal' phenomena is a foundational, if often latent or repressed condition for any critique, including that which has as its target the construction of such boundaries themselves.⁷ Such accounts are by definition grounded in

⁶ For an earlier consideration of the notion of social 'pathology', particularly as regards the relationship between 'system' and 'lifeworld' in processes of modern rationalisation, see Habermas (1987).

⁷ It is interesting that Michel Foucault, whose work has arguably been most fundamental to dismantling the construction of deviance and normality, had very clear ideas about such boundaries in his own intellectual and political work. During a debate with Noam Chomsky, when asked 'which malady contemporary society is most afflicted', Foucault answered, 'I would say that our society has been afflicted by a disease, a very curious, a very paradoxical disease, for which we haven't yet found a name; and this mental disease has a very curious symptom, which is that the symptom itself brought the mental disease into being' (Elders 1971/2006: 59).

normative assumptions about truth, right and human nature. Honneth explains that 'if we claim that a society's characteristic desires or interests have taken a wrong turn, or if we problematize the mechanisms by which they are generated, then we are implicitly defending the thesis that a given set of social relations has violated the conditions which constitute a necessary presupposition for the good life' (2007: 56).

In this case, the preconditions for the 'good life' include hope and the need or desire for transcendence and freedom; the social relations violating these conditions are the relations of neo-liberal capitalism.⁸ The hypothesis is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to counter the deleterious effects of capitalism because its relations of production and cultural practices not only disable the critical imagination of alternatives and the organization of collective action, but also produce types of human beings for whom these practices are subjectively and objectively meaningless. The empirical evidence for this, it is argued, is that utopia – as a genre, a project and a form of anticipatory knowledge – is either vanishing from public culture, or (less often) already extinct. This is said to signify the structural preclusion of hope, which has long been considered an innate motivational resource for individual and collective agency in democratic participation, progressive politics and social revolution (Smith 2005).⁹

It has become relatively commonplace to speak about the 'crisis of hope' as an actually existing and generalized social condition to be observed, described and acted upon. In the early 1980s, for example, Jürgen Habermas spoke of the 'exhaustion of utopian energies' associated with the legitimation crisis of the welfare state and the declining importance and possibility of the emancipatory potential of non-alienated social labour in late capitalist societies (Habermas 1989).¹⁰ Two decades on, Frederic Jameson has argued that there continues to be

⁸ David Harvey defines neo-liberalism as 'in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (2007: 2). However, it has been clear for some time that while the term 'neo-liberalism' was initially used to describe a specific economic ideology it has come to mean something entirely more complex.

⁹ For a useful and provocative typology of different 'modes of hoping' (including 'patient, critical, estimative, resolute and utopian' forms of hope), see Webb (2007a).

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion of the relationship between Habermas' analysis and more recent diagnoses of a 'crisis of hope', see Browne (2005).

a powerful anti-utopian tendency or even 'revolt against utopia' in intellectual and political life, and that the 'waning of the utopian idea is a fundamental historical and political symptom, which deserves diagnosis in its own right' (Jameson 2004: 41, 36).¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman paints a slightly different version of this 'crisis', arguing that while 'utopia will never die because humans cannot and will not stop hoping', we nevertheless inhabit a 'post-utopian' society in which it has become necessary to symbolically defend the very value of hope before one can set about discussing it (2004).¹² Indeed, in the post-Soviet period serious charges have been levied against utopianism, namely, that it is an inverted form of totalitarianism. The neoconservative Right equate 'utopianism' with Stalinist-style and fundamentalist politics, while the anti-authoritarian and post-modern Left define it as an ontological offence to difference and complexity¹³ – and in much critical theory, utopia has the neurotic privilege of being both imperative and desirable and impossible and dangerous.¹⁴ According to Bauman, this delegitimation of utopianism from both left and right creates a sense that there are 'no visible bridges' left to a better society and no collective will to cross any that might be built (Jacobsen and Tester 2007: 309).¹⁵ In a recently published collection of interviews about hope with intellectuals and cultural workers, Mary Zournazi similarly concludes that 'we live in a world where our belief, faith and trust in political or individual actions are increasingly being threatened, leading to despair and uncertainty' (2002: 14). In more public space, Anthony Giddens recently issued a 'call to arms' in the British left-of-centre newspaper *The Guardian*, claiming that 'there are no longer utopian projects that would supply a source of direction for social reform and a source of motivating ideas' (2006).

¹¹ Jameson (2004: 41, fn. 4) defines anti-utopia as 'the expression of the fiercely anti-utopian and anti-revolutionary ideology for which utopias inevitably lead to repression and dictatorship, to conformity and boredom'.

¹² It is significant to note that he made a similar argument to explain the more specific decline of socialist politics three decades ago (Bauman 1976), and that Habermas long ago recognised historical struggles to rehabilitate the idea of 'utopia' as a 'legitimate medium for depicting alternative life possibilities that are seen as inherent in the historical process itself' (1989: 50).

¹³ See, e.g., Gray 2007 as an example of conservative anti-utopianism, and Daniel and Moylan (1997), Jameson (2005) and Levitas (2005) for critical discussions of this tendency.

¹⁴ See especially Whitebook's *Perversion and Utopia* (1996). I am grateful to Harry Dahms for this pointing me towards this work.

¹⁵ Bauman argues that this distinguishes us from Marx, whom he claims was convinced that large-scale, revolutionary, top-down social change was imminent and desirable in his lifetime. However, as illustrated above, Marx's earlier writing suggests that prior to 1848 he himself was doubtful about the nature and possibility of revolutionary agency within German and wider European societies (Marx 1843).

This diagnosis takes on more dystopian dimensions as well, with writers announcing the 'celebration of the end of social dreams' (Dinerstein and Neary quoted in McLaren 2001: 117) and lamenting the decline of societies where individuals 'sleepwalk' through utterly dominated lives, having only nightmares about impossibly determined futures or living in deluded, mediated fantasies (Weiler 2003). Writing from Britain, Dinerstein and Neary suggest that in our everyday lives as well as in more formal theory-work we stand against projects of systematic 'disutopia' (1999).¹⁶ In its most radical versions, such work sketches out a dystopian future where Max Weber's 'iron cage' of capitalist rationality is locked from within and where capabilities of emancipatory reason are quite literally educated out of human nature (Beck 2002). These extreme forms of hopelessness and anti-hope are linked directly to the dangerous excesses of post-modern capitalism (Ainley and Canaan 2005; Giroux 2004; McLaren 2001), and the prognosis is sometimes apocalyptic.¹⁷ Indeed, spectres of authoritarianism and (proto)fascism are again being pronounced on the politico-pedagogical landscape, and the classical work of first and second-generation critical theorists is being rehabilitated as attention returns once again to explaining and idealistically combating the subtle, complicated mechanisms of subjective domination in contemporary society.

Some theorists, such as Frederic Jameson, argue that this trend towards 'disutopia' is a consequence of material injustice and symptomatic of a form of 'globalization' which segregates the world's populations into equally anti-utopian halves:

In one of these worlds, the disintegration of the social is so absolute—misery, poverty, unemployment, starvation, squalor, violence and death—that the intricately elaborated social schemes of utopian thinkers become as frivolous as they are irrelevant. In the other, unparalleled wealth, computerized production, scientific and medical discoveries unimaginable a century ago as well as an endless variety of commercial and cultural pleasures, seem to have rendered utopian fantasy and speculation as boring and antiquated as pre-technological narratives of space flight (Jameson 2005).

¹⁶ 'Disutopia' refers not simply to the broader 'waning of utopia' often discussed, but is based on a specific theory of the 'subsumption of concrete labour by abstract labour' (Allman *et al.* 2000: 16).

¹⁷ See, for example, Gray's (2003) 'dire warning' for intellectual life and Giroux's (2004) *Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the eclipse of democracy*.

Here, 'possibility' and fate are understood not as inherent features of human nature, but as Mills once argued, as 'feature[s] of an historically specific kind of social structure' (1959: 183) or unmediated subjective expressions of structural power relations. While Jameson himself has long defended the value of utopian imaginaries, he also asserts that these are only meaningful or indeed possible within certain socio-historical and cultural arrangements (Jameson 2005).

In addition to such concerns about inequality and exploitation, however, there is considerable concern about changes in the culture(s) of post-modern capitalism, particularly those that disable democratic sociation and critical thought. These anxieties are expressed in the traditional vocabulary of the political Left, and include the privatization and commercialization of public life, the disarticulation of 'the social' and collective social responsibility, the censorship and enclosure of democratic cultures and relatively autonomous public spheres, the decline of sustained social movements, the rise of cultural authoritarianism and societies of control, the empowerment of new, aggressive forms of military and cultural imperialism, the commercialization of culture and identity, and the drift in democratic societies towards more authoritarian forms of political and ideological control (Bauman 2004; Coté *et al.* 2007; Giddens 2006; Giroux 2004, 2007; Habermas 1999; Harvey 2005; Jameson 2005; McLaren 2002; Sennett 1998). This constellation of related phenomena is widely (and I think largely inaccurately) referred to simply as 'neo-liberal capitalism', and each of these conditions is said to contribute to what Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire once described as the 'inflexible negation of the right to dream differently, to dream of utopia' (2001: 22).

Freire's use of the term 'right' is telling, for his judgment is based on a first principle that human beings possess a natural (or at least historically regular) 'utopian impulse'; a longing *to be* that is unjustly, albeit often unconsciously, suppressed or unlearned within this social order. Such assertions are, on the one hand, anthropological and essentialist. Zygmunt Bauman (2004), for example, argues that 'to hope is to be human'; Darren Webb recently claimed that hope is a 'human universal that can be experienced in different modes' (2007: 65); and Freire (1998: 69) concluded even more bluntly that 'the absence of hope is not the "normal" way to be human. It is a distortion.' However, appeals to the anthropological normality of hope and the deviant nature of its suppression are also existentialist insofar as they assume that 'revolt, need, hope, rejection and desire' are socially constituted and that they emerge from inter-subjective

experience within particular historical conditions (de Beauvoir 1948). From this unconventional combination of humanist essentialism and existentialist philosophy emerges a hypothesis that some of the most powerful, empirically existing intellectual and emotional resources of resistance to dehumanization that have been available to past generations – namely, utopian imaginaries and the ethical will and capability to conceptualize alternative ways of being – have themselves been materially transformed.¹⁸

The 'root-of-all-evil' diagnosis¹⁹ in this narrative of social decline is the loss of the human capacity or will to desire hope itself, either because individuals have lost the ability or desire to imagine alternative ways of being (i.e., an erosion of both critical and anticipatory forms of consciousness) or because they are deprived of the structural possibilities of agency that this will had heretofore been rooted in.²⁰ These arguments are theoretically significant because they go beyond tactical critiques of particular social problems and suggest pathological changes in the *quality and total way of being* in post-modern capitalist societies. The present 'crisis of hope' is regarded as a materially-based distortion of subjective human development. In other words, the question is no longer whether certain social arrangements are possible or debating their desirability, but rather whether the entire organization of the social environment disables people from developing the psychological and emotional desire for personal transcendence or social change, and prevents them from developing the inter-subjective empathy and compassion that would allow them to identify with the suffering of others. We suspect we may be losing or have lost, not only as Adorno once put it, 'the capacity to imagine the totality as something entirely different' (quoted in Daniel and Moylan 1997: vii), but in some cases the deeper desire to do so, and in other cases, where given reality seems impenetrable, the will to even try. This, the reification of impossibility, is the contemporary crisis of hope – not simply a shift in ways of knowing or enacting society, but as C. Wright Mills once wrote, a concern about

¹⁸ Darren Webb makes a similar observation, identifying two 'contrasting perspectives' on hope, one that understands it as an essential feature of human existence and another that views it as a social construction. He proposes a 'more nuanced' approach that would understand hope as '*both* biologically rooted *and* socially constructed' (2007: 67).

¹⁹ This phrase is used by both Frederic Jameson and Gustavo Gutierrez.

²⁰ However, we must here recall the situated nature of utopian diagnoses, for as Jameson points out, 'their root-of-all-evil diagnosis...will also reflect a specific class-historical standpoint or perspective' (2004: 47). Similarly, Honneth reminds us that 'what constitutes the standard according to which social pathologies are evaluated is an ethical conception of social normality tailored to conditions that enable human self-realization' (2007: 36).

'pervasive transformations of the very "nature" of man [*sic*] and the conditions and aims of his life' (1959: 13).

Need, desire and hope in critical theory

There is hence an enormous urgency about much of the literature on 'critical hope'. However, it is neither unprecedented nor unusual for critical theorists to be occupied with identifying and monitoring forces of dehumanization within capitalist societies. Nor is post-modern capitalism the first social order to threaten 'critical hope' or to manipulate need and desire, and utopia has been 'waning' for quite a prolonged while (Kumar 1987; Milojevic 2003).²¹ The over-arching analytical framework is so familiar, in fact, that it often seems either woefully unoriginal or indicative of a remarkable historical continuity which makes the critical analyses of mid-twentieth century societies prescient for our own (James 2006).²² What is relatively new, however, is the particular interest in rehabilitating hope, utopia, need and desire as mainstream categories of critical analysis. The classical works of Karl Marx, Karl Mannheim, William Morris, Edward P. Thompson, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno are increasingly being dusted off and re-excavated for insight into the empirical and normative foundations of these concepts.²³ This project is long overdue, for despite the enduring inclination amongst first and second-generation critical theorists to suspect that there was something empirically indomitable and theoretically important about hope, the concept has been treated unevenly at best (Smith 2005). There are several notable exceptions: Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1959), Herbert Marcuse's *Revolution of Hope* (1968) and 'The end of utopia' (1970), Walter Benjamin's work on hope and history (1940; see also Gur-Ze'ev 1998), and passing

²¹ Consider, for example, Adorno's much earlier comment that 'nowadays the critique of utopia has sunk into the common ideological stockpile, while at the same time the triumph of technical productivity strives to maintain the illusion that utopia, incompatible with the relations of production, has already been realized within its realm' (1968).

²² Consider, for example, the epistemological relationship between Adorno's essay on 'Education after Auschwitz' (1968) and Giroux's 'Education after Abu Ghraib' (2004). Does Adorno provide analytical tools for disclosing forces of domination and 'dissolving the spells' of cultural domination in post-modern capitalist society? Or do the normative principles and general categories of analysis of critical theory serve as rhetorical frameworks? What is the relationship between the Holocaust and the American 'war on terror'? Is this a new phenomenon (and if so why do the classical theories seem so relevant) or is it a manifestation of a longer historical process that has been ongoing or that we see repeated in different times and places (and if so, why is it being interpreted as new)?

²³ See, for example, Anderson (2006), Daniel and Moylan (1997) and Gur-Ze'ev (1998).

references to hope and utopia in other writings. More recently, however, hope and utopia have re-emerged as organizing principles for entire theoretical projects: David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* (2000), Susan Buck-Morss' *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The passing of mass utopia in East and West* (2000), Immanuel Wallerstein's *Utopistics* (1998), Frederic Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) and Erik Olin Wright's 'Real Utopias Project' (1991–present) being only a few obvious examples.

A crucial question arises here: how should we interpret this intellectual and political migration towards hope and utopia, particularly given the long-standing 'theoretical aversion' to hope in critical theory (Smith 2005)? Why, after three decades of deliberate movement away from both philosophical anthropology and normative universals, after the routinization of the post-modern and cultural turns, do we find renewed interest in hitherto marginalised (and often maligned) concepts of human nature, need, desire, will, hope and utopia?²⁴ It has perhaps predictably been argued that this is simply an ideological expression of the more structural 'dissipation of utopian energies' in post-modern capitalist societies (Browne 2005; Sinnerbrink *et al.* 2005). In such interpretations hope is associated with compensatory ideology or naïve optimism, a foil to the transformative potential of 'radical hopelessness' or more goal-oriented critical utopias (Chopra 2004). When thus defined as diluted or disempowered utopianism, hope is interpreted as an unimaginative and cowardly reaction to the political and intellectual fragmentation of the Left, the implosion of grand narratives of historical agency, and the censorship or incorporation of all mass alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism. It is hence singled out from other extramundane concepts like justice, desire, memory and love as something particularly 'amateurish', 'second-rate', immature, and even 'religious' (Smith 2005: 46-8; see also Levitas 2005: 171), and scholarly interest in utopianism stigmatized as 'unscientific' anachronism (Daniel and Moylan 1997).²⁵ Indeed, E. P. Thompson once argued that the debate between 'scientific' and 'utopian' socialism in nineteenth-century Europe had shaped the entire architecture of thought about both Marxism and utopia in unfortunate ways. Referring to the essay 'Socialism – utopian and scientific' (Marx and Engels 1859: 68-111), Thompson quipped that we had been 'running away from the acceptance of

²⁴ This interest in need, desire and subjectivity also places these theorists in a particularly marginal position within the Marxist tradition (for more on this see Kellner 1997: 87).

²⁵ For an interesting discussion on the rise of the non-Marxist and post-Marxist left, see Therborn (2007).

utopianism as a valid imaginative form, because of a fright given to us by Engels in 1880' (Thompson 1976: 101). Hence, although utopian vision is central to critical theory, the dominance of its more materialist and scientized orientations has institutionalized an anxiety that entertaining the utopian imagination is a shameful flight from 'concrete politics' into an inhibiting form of intellectual bad faith.²⁶

However, such critiques of the turn towards hope and utopia do little to aid its interpretation. Are these theories accurate diagnoses of a new, empirically existing form of ideologically-based determinism in post-modern capitalist societies; literally, the historical 'end of social dreams'? Are they more accurately discourses which express the class-specific critiques of a disempowered and disappointed Left that is attempting to crack through the hegemony of neo-liberal 'utopias' in a largely post-socialist world? Are new theories of hope and utopia enabled by the 'affective turn' in critical and cultural theory, which opens up greater opportunities to legitimately inquire into emotional aspects of social life and concepts such as respect, love, fear and desire? (Anderson and Harrison 2006; Webb 2007) Or might they be interpreted as secular theodicies which seek to explain – again, still – how and why injustice, irrationality and inhumanity continue to be so legitimately executed in and by ostensibly 'enlightened', privileged, democratic and humane societies?

I would like to argue that these factors constitute a familiar constellation that critical theorists have developed to explain the relationship between the material conditions of society, human subjectivity, and the possibilities for radical social

²⁶ Here Thompson refers to Marx's and Engels' critique of 'utopian socialism' as represented by 'idealists' such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier (see Levitas 2005: 6-7; Jameson 2005: xii). It is important to note that Engels the situated nature of their work (which he also admired). Each version of socialism claimed to be the 'expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, [which] has only to be discovered [accidentally] to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power'. In addition, he argued, 'as each one's special kind of absolute truth, reason, and justice is again conditioned by his subjective understanding, his conditions of existence, the measure of his knowledge and his intellectual training, there is no other ending possible in this conflict of absolute truths than that they shall be mutually exclusive of one another.' In other words, in much the same way as Karl Mannheim regarded competing political ideologies as a crisis of truth, Engels regarded intellectual and political pluralism as the source of a 'mish-mash' type of socialism. He argued that this conditionality should be done away with; that what was needed was a *science* of socialism that was placed on a '*real basis*'. He argued that history, politics and anticipatory vision should be not metaphysical but economic, rooted in class struggle and understood dialectically. For Engels, the difference between utopian and scientific socialism was that the first attempted to 'manufacture a system of society as perfect as possible' while the second aimed to 'examine the historico-economic succession of events from which these classes and their antagonism had of necessity sprung, and to discover in the economic conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict'.

transformation. It combines philosophical anthropology (i.e., philosophies of 'human nature'), socialist politics, theories linking individual subjectivity to socio-economic structure, and normative commitment to (variably defined) values of freedom, justice, truth and right. Interpreted within this framework, the 'crisis of hope' can neither be reduced to a world-historical threat to human nature nor explained as an epiphenomenal 'shift in critical reflections on late modernity from the possibility of utopia to the problem of hope' (Browne 2005). I would suggest that it rather constitutes a new version of a familiar and paradoxical 'social pathology': that a fundamental crisis of critical, anticipatory consciousness has emerged from the relations of production of post-modern capitalism, and that this phenomenon threatens to make impossible the subjective possibilities for their material transformation. At the same time, developments in post-modern critical theory – many of which also emerge from these same relations – enable us to take the analysis of this paradoxical situation even further than classical critical theorists ever could. A number of unresolved theoretical problematics are hence productively re-opened, including the ontological nature of anticipatory knowledge, the role of ideas and ideologies in motivating social action, and the social constitution of human need and desire that motivate different 'modes of hoping' in the first place.²⁷

Classical roots of critical–utopian education

This is one reason that critical educators have turned to classical critical theories as inspiration for analyzing and resisting subjective dehumanization within post-modern capitalism. Four first and second-generation theorists – Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno – now appear prominently in critical educational theory to inform questions of how need and desire are constituted within particular social systems, and how they might be radically reconstituted within the same. While they disagreed about the relationships between critique and utopia and pedagogy and politics, as well as about the ontological nature of human need and desire, all ultimately argued that political movements for radical freedom must include a subjective process of critical-utopian education.

Ernst Bloch's work, for example has been invoked by educators to theorize the notion of 'critical hope', defined as the 'desire for a better way of living expressed

²⁷ For more on 'modes of hoping' see Webb (2007).

in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible that alternative way of life' (Levitas 1993: 257). Such hope is also regarded as a form of 'militant utopianism' that 'pluralizes politics by generating dissent against the claims of a false hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism and authoritarian social values (Giroux 2003: 477). Bloch understood hope as an ontological fact: 'not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but, concretely and correctly grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole' (Bloch 1985: 7). His philosophy of hope is balanced, rather precariously, inside the unresolved tension between human nature and social contingency. On the one hand, Bloch assumed that expectation, desire, 'thinking-forward' and thinking-better are inherently human properties. As Douglas Kellner argues, 'Bloch always begins with the wishing, hopeful, needy, and hungry human being and analyzes what prohibits realization of human desire and fulfilment of human needs' (1997: 87). On the other hand, however, the hope instinct is not simply biological. Bloch was critical of hypotheses that our 'natural' behaviours – including self-preservation – can be explained as unconscious drives (Bloch 1985: 77-64). 'All definitions of basic drives', he argued, 'only flourish in the soil of their own time and are limited to that time...[they] cannot be made absolute, even less separated from the economic being of mankind in each age' (Bloch 1985: 69).

Thus on the one hand, Bloch argued that as a species we require hope; 'hopelessness is itself, in a temporal and factual sense, the most insupportable thing, downright intolerable to human needs' (Bloch 2005: 5). On the other hand, if hope proceeds 'uneducated', without guidance about how to formulate 'informed discontent', the desire to know what is In-Front-of-Us can turn into a dangerously abstract form of fantasy which Bloch calls 'fraudulent hope' (i.e., ideology). We must therefore learn how to hope 'correctly'; to 'think beyond' in forms of 'educated hope' (*docta spes*) or 'concrete utopia', rather than merely 'wishful thinking'. For Bloch, therefore, the proper method and objective of education was the critical hermeneutics of everyday life. We must learn to read past and present society not for what it is but for what it once intended to be, seeking out the 'utopian residue or surplus that can be used for social critique and to advance progressive politics' (Kellner 1997: 82). As Kellner puts it, Bloch offers a form of cultural ideology critique that 'is not merely unmasking (*Entlarvung*) but is also uncovering and discovery: revelations of unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, abortive hopes that can be resurrected, enlivened and realized in our current situation' (1997: 84).

While Bloch does not make reference to 'true' or 'false' possibilities, he made clear in his work that only educated, concrete intimations towards socialism were to be considered adequate forms of resistance to forces of exploitation, alienation and oppression (Kellner 1997: 94). His teleological conception of hope is exemplified by a passage from one of Karl Marx's early letters to Arnold Ruge, which Bloch refers to repeatedly in *The Principle of Hope*:

Our motto must therefore be; reform of consciousness not through dogmas but through the analysis of mystical consciousness which is still unclear to itself. It will then become apparent that the world has long possessed the dream of a matter, of which it must only possess the consciousness in order to possess it in reality. It will become apparent that it is not a question of the great thought-dash between past and future, but of the *carrying through* of the thoughts of the past. (Marx 1843; also in Levitas 1997: 69)

The need for this movement – for following a 'red arrow' of socialist movement through historical progress – was empirically factual for Bloch, evident in the way that 'succeeding ages "re-function" the material of the past to suit their ideological requirements'. Although only some of these projects could be considered progressive, he believed that 'from all progressive thinking a utopian surplus is carried over into the future' (Plaice *et al.* 1995: xxvii). This latent potentiality has only to be uncovered and revealed, in all societies at all times, in order to be consciously realized.

Although Bloch's theory of 'educated hope' is extremely relevant for theorizing pedagogical contributions to struggles for human freedom, his deep commitment to a particular vision of socialism as the teleological culmination of all human dreams, wishes, hopes and desires was not fully shared by other critical theorists. *To Have or To Be?* (1976), for example, challenged this asymmetry by arguing that both actually-existing capitalism and actually-existing socialism were modernist distortions of human hope. The 'Great Promise of Unlimited Progress', as Fromm called it, was founded on two main principles: hedonism and egoism (i.e., the obsessive pursuit of individual pleasure). He argued that both were believed to be dominant elements of 'human nature', but the irony was that this ideologically-based belief constituted a threat to human existence itself. What could be more abnormal, he asked, more 'pathogenic' than a collective desire for a way of life that was ultimately its own negation? (Fromm 1976: 19) In other words, Fromm argued that the very *acts* of hoping, needing and desiring within advanced industrial societies must be defined as ideological practices of subjective domination. Like Bloch, he believed that under 'normal' conditions

'human beings have an inherent and deeply rooted desire to be: to express our faculties, to be active, to be related to others, to escape the prison cell of selfishness' (1976: 103).²⁸ The desire for freedom and transcendence, while it might be repressed, could thus never actually cease to be a potentiality (2001: 247).

However, Fromm believed that the human character also has the potential to be shaped otherwise by the socio-economic system that requires it (Rickert 1986: 360). He therefore inquired into the nature of desire itself – its deformity, rather than its formation. Like many of his contemporaries, he was particularly interested in explaining why 'the strongest of all instincts, that for survival, seems to ceased to have motivate us' to make radical changes in the way we live (1976: 19). He posited a number of hypotheses: the emptying and technocracization of politics; social atomization and egoistic action; collective fear of radical change; and 'the view that we have no alternatives to the models of corporate capitalism, social democratic or Soviet socialism, or "technocratic fascism with a smiling face"' (1976: 20). Ultimately, Fromm's solution to combat this tendency was pedagogical. To restore the normality of human desire to realize unlimited potentials, it would be necessary to produce a 'radical change of the human heart' as well as effecting 'drastic economic and social changes...that give the human heart the chance for change and the courage and vision to achieve it' (1976: 19).²⁹ This, he argued, would be an essentially 'educational process' of change (ibid. 173).

For Herbert Marcuse, the relationship between subjective and objective change was more problematic. He described capitalist domination as a 'counter-revolution anchored in the instinctual structure' of individuals (1971: 21), and argued that

²⁸ For more about Fromm's psycho-social theory of human need and desire, see John Rickert's (1986) excellent discussion of *Escape from Freedom* (1941/1994), *Man for Himself* (1947/2003) and *The Sane Society* (1955/2001), as well as numerous of Fromm's essays.

²⁹ As an example of the mutually dependent relationship between ideational and material change might work, he offered the example of consumption. 'Sane consumption', or patterns of consumption that did not destroy either human beings or their environments, could not be forced upon people. 'To force citizens to consume what the state decides is best – even if it *is* the best – is out of the question. Bureaucratic control that would forcibly block consumption would only make people all the more consumption hungry. Sane consumption can only take place if an ever-increasing number of people *want* to change their consumption patterns and their lifestyles. And this is possible only if people are offered a type of consumption that is more attractive than the one they are used to. This cannot happen overnight or by decree, but will require a slow educational process, and in this the government must play an important role.' (Fromm 1976: 173)

its transformation demanded a 'radical transvaluation of values' (Marcuse 1971: 15).

A society constantly re-creates, this side of consciousness and ideology, patterns of behaviour and aspiration as part of the "nature" of its people, and unless the revolt reaches into this "second" nature, into these ingrown patterns, social change will remain incomplete, even self-defeating. (Marcuse 1971: 20; see also 1964: 4-5).

Because Marcuse believed that political injustices were internalized into the deep psychological structures of individuals – and that the potential for radical resistance was also instinctually rooted (Rickert 1986: 368) – he placed deep subjectivity at the heart of social change. The creation of 'true' needs would motivate new types of political action towards a non-aggressive, non-alienating, non-oppressive society. For Marcuse, there was one obvious and empirically verifiable category of 'false' needs in any society: needs that 'perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice' – not only for oneself, but also for the others upon which our 'happiness' may depend (1964: 5). These needs can and must be resisted and unlearned, for 'we find ourselves up against a system...whose internal contradictions repeatedly manifest themselves in inhuman and unnecessary wars and whose growing productivity is growing destruction and growing waste' (Marcuse 1970a: 108).³⁰

Throughout his work, Marcuse therefore criticized the 'socially engineered arrest of consciousness' in highly industrialized societies where 'capitalist progress....not only reduces the environment of freedom, the "open space" of the human existence, but also the "longing", the need for such an environment' (1969: 25-26). Under such conditions, alternatives to existing reality through either critique or utopian imagination become irrelevant because they do not correspond to individuals' needs and desires, which are synonymous with those of the dominant system (Marcuse 1969: 82, 1970; see also Lodziak 2005). Hence, for Marcuse, radical pedagogy was central to a cultural revolution that prioritized the transformation of instinctual needs themselves. He advocated not only 'liberating the consciousness of...realizable possibilities', but also argued that cultural revolutionaries should 'work on the development of consciousness' (Marcuse

³⁰ This quote continues: 'Such a system is not immune. It is already defending itself against opposition, even that of intellectuals, in all corners of the world. And even if we see no transformation, we must fight on. We must resist if we still want to live as human beings, to work and be happy. In alliance with the system we can no longer do so.'

1970: 74), on creating a 'new sensibility' at the level of 'second nature' or 'socialized instinct' (Marcuse 1969: 21), and on 'transforming the will itself so that people no longer want what they want now' (Marcuse 1970: 77). He argued that 'morality is not necessarily and not primarily ideological. In the face of an amoral society, it becomes a political weapon' (Marcuse 1969: 8).

Theodor Adorno also addressed the cultural formation of needs, desires and values and envisioned a strong role for education in this process, while remaining perpetually critical of the role that formal education played in shaping anti-democratic attitudes and relationships. In 'Education after Auschwitz', for example, he asserted that the deliberate formation of subjective human psychology was the only legitimate defence against an insurgent 'barbarism [which] is inscribed within the principle of civilization' (1967: 1). Here he parts company with Bloch, Fromm and Marcuse, whose theories assumed that education was ultimately a corrective practice which aimed to restore some state of normality against the pathological pedagogies of late-modern capitalism. For Adorno (1967), the problem was darker: Auschwitz, the Armenian genocide, the dropping of atomic bombs – these were not anomalous events but rather 'expressions of an extremely powerful societal tendency' towards dehumanization that is an ever-present potentiality within human beings, emboldened under some conditions and repressed in others. He argued that traditional educational practices – in schools, but also the more widespread pedagogies of mass culture – produced individuals who were psychologically 'cold': unable to love others, and unable to relate to others' suffering or their desires.³¹

Adorno agreed with Fromm and Marcuse it would be an authoritarian irony to 'force' people to love, and that there was thus no reason to 'appeal to eternal values, at which the very people who are prone to commit such atrocities would merely shrug their shoulders'. Neither did he see any point in attempting to humanize victims or 'enlighten' persecutors 'about the positive qualities possessed by persecuted minorities' (Adorno 1967: 2). Instead, he argued, critical education must attempt to elicit the *need* for love within individuals who do not experience it through a process of critical self-reflection, and the capability for civic 'maturity' (Adorno and Becker 1991). Indeed, despite Adorno's deep ambivalence about the promises of enlightenment and rational knowledge, he

³¹ 'The inability to identify with others was unquestionably the most important psychological condition for the fact that something like Auschwitz could have occurred in the midst of more or less civilized and innocent people.' (Adorno 1967: 8)

argued that while barbarism could not be eradicated solely through subjective change, 'education and enlightenment can still manage a little something' in the perpetual struggle against it (Adorno 1967: 10). 'If anything can help against coldness as the condition for disaster', he wrote, 'then it is the insight into the conditions that determine it and the attempt to combat those conditions, initially in the domain of the individual' (1967: 9).

These classical examples illustrate that the concepts of need, desire and hope have been central to critical theory, and that they have been intricately connected to cultural and pedagogical practices. However, instead of being considered useful analytical categories, they are regarded as embarrassing reminders of more 'naïve' explanations of the relationship between individual subjectivities and social forces. The arrogation that 'theorists' might be able to distinguish universal 'true needs' from 'false needs' through rational critical analysis has been challenged by the insight that these normative judgments are themselves socially situated. It is argued that questions of 'need' and 'desire' must instead be dealt with existentially and empirically, or indeed, that we must abandon them entirely. There have thus been attempts to make this an anti-metaphysical and empirical problem. Browne, for example, describes critical theory as combining 'utopian projections with the explication of the needs of subjects that are unfulfilled and the empirical analysis of the developmental tendencies of capitalist society', not a method to 'juxtapose an ideal state against existing conditions of oppression and inequality'. It is, in this definition, a 'synthesis of normative and empirical analysis to disclose change in the present that prefigure an emancipated or democratic society' (Browne 2005: 65). In another example, Honneth, suggests that we can observe context-dependent manifestations of 'need' and 'desire' in instances where 'human subjects are denied the recognition they feel they deserve'; in other words, in 'such moral experiences as feelings of social disrespect' (Honneth 2007: 71). In this case, we are no longer responsible for attributing 'true' and 'false' needs to individuals or for assuming that people share some collective experience of desire for transcendence that is impeded by particular social conditions. Instead, if we assume only that all human beings have a 'pre-theoretical' need for recognition, we need only be responsible for identifying instances in which this need is unfulfilled and then 'reveal the socio-structural causes responsible for a distortion of the social framework of recognition in each particular case' (Honneth 2007: 74). While we can not use this approach to distinguish between universally legitimate or 'natural' needs and desires and 'distorted' forms that have been imposed or constructed by social forces, we can

at least verify the existence of a 'pre-theoretical resource' which alerts us to an incongruity between personal desire or expectation and the experience of social reality (2007: 77).

For critical theorists who diagnose a systemic 'crisis of hope', however, these 'pre-theoretical' needs that might alert individuals to the need for change are *not* immediately visible. In fact, the conspicuous absence of incongruity between personal needs, desires and hopes and systemic values and relationships is precisely the problem to be addressed. It is generally accepted that critical theory can no longer be considered an intellectual exposition of a 'process of emancipation which is already under way' amongst communities of struggle (Honneth 1997: 78). However, it is also not simply a question of how people who are 'victimized, disrespected and ostracized' might become able to articulate themselves in a democratic public sphere instead of 'living out [their experiences] in a counterculture of violence' (Honneth 2007: 78). Rather, it is a matter of trying to explain why a social system which seems empirically to proliferate relations of disrespect for human life and happiness does not result in cognitive or emotional dissonance, but rather 'appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and desires' to the extent that it becomes 'so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open for question' (Harvey 2007: 5). It is a question of why we are lacking, in the words of Frederic Jameson, the 'desire called utopia' (2005) which constitutes the ultimate justification for any critical analysis of actually existing social reality, or of social reality as it is perceived and interpreted.

From *conscientization* to the 'education of desire'

The project of producing this desire is therefore now being interpreted as the primary task of education by critical pedagogues who subscribe to the 'death of utopia' pathology and who see the rehabilitation of utopian imagination on a grand scale as fundamental to the creation of alternatives to post-modern capitalism. The 'education of desire' is an analytical concept used to describe a particular thread of ideas within critical utopian socialist philosophy that emphasizes the centrality of ideational and ideological transformation in social change. E. P. Thompson (1976) borrowed the term from Miguel Abensour (1973), who wrote a now oft-cited article defending the value of utopianism in Marxist

critical thought.³² Abensour's goal was to defend William Morris, an English writer and socialist activist whose utopian fiction and political lectures on hope were maligned by champions of 'scientific socialism' in the early twentieth century as overly 'romantic'. Abensour argued that rather than attempting to rescue Morris (or any other utopian) from embarrassment by emphasizing his 'scientific' qualities, we must rather rescue the critical tradition from a form of sterilising scientized rationality which ignores the materiality of subjective factors such as emotion, need, desire and hope in radical social change. Long before the rise of 'sociology of emotions', Abensour (and Thompson) asserted that problems of freedom, emancipation and transcendence cannot be understood solely through rational analysis (or analysis of rational action).

Significantly, the meaning of 'critical' shifts slightly in the context of the education of desire. The dominant definition of 'critical' has historically referred to the taming or making 'scientific' of pre-existing needs, desires or longings for emancipation and change so that they did not become ideological, fanatical or un-reflexive. This is the root stuff of 'educated hope' and 'concrete utopia'; of learning to distinguish between fantasies of social change and more 'realistic utopias' that inform political practice. While the 'critical' prefix maintains this concern in the new context, it also prioritizes its more utopian and normative dimensions. In a world dominated by 'realism', the aim of criticality is to *create* the desire or need for such values. Its goal is to produce alternative knowledge, values, emotions and identities as well as to educate rational critique. The 'education of desire' hence departs from the science of consciousness-raising by recognizing the *affective* and *imaginative* conditions of social action – asserting, in other words, the merits of utopianism as a means of cultural transformation and resistance. It refers not only to the utopian practice of critical education, but also to the critical education of utopian imagination and desire. This practice is now being asserted as one of the most appropriate responses to the forces of 'disutopia' in post-modern capitalist society.

Contemporary critical theorists and educators rarely use the term 'education of desire'. But they do speak frequently about things such as 'raising ambitions, desires and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice' (Burbules and Berk 1999: 51) and 'working with students to nurture...hunger for utopian social dreams' (Canaan

³² Ruth Levitas elaborates a useful discussion of this in her essay on 'the imaginary reconstitution of society' (2005).

2007: 76).³³ In assuming this task, however, educators find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they are often (though certainly not always) challenged, resisted and resented by the individuals and institutions they claim to want to 'emancipate'. In particular, student apathy about or resistance to critical pedagogy is regarded as a consequence of intellectual, political, ethical and existential colonization by the prevailing logic of power.³⁴ In other words, critical educators interpret the *absence of, denial of or indifference* towards the 'crisis of hope' as symptomatic of the crisis itself.

This tension – and it is a moral and political tension as well as a practical one – parallels the philosophical dilemma in contemporary critical theory: that 'without some form of proof that its critical perspective is reinforced by a need or a movement within social reality', critical theory (and critical pedagogy) loses its legitimacy (Honneth 2007: 66). In other words, in education as well as in theory, 'what is primarily disputed today is whether we can still consider useful a form of social criticism that owes its standards not to "immanent" ideas of the good or the just, but to "external" notions of value' (Honneth 2007: 50). If we cannot locate justification for normative standards of truth and justice outside of what presently exists as knowable, and if we cannot arrogate value for any vision that is not universally and democratically shared by others, must the entire critical project come crashing down, leaving in its wake nothing but our immanent and imminent 'reality'?

Here critical pedagogy has something to offer critical theory, for this tension has become a problematic rather than a *Thanatos*. Many educators do not simply assume or accept that critical theory can remain legitimate only insofar as it can claim to 'give a sociological account of the condition of the society's state of consciousness or its [empirically existing] desire for emancipation' (Honneth 1993/2007: 65). The political and moral imperatives of their own practice preclude this conclusion. Instead, they argue that we can use the theoretical tools of critique not only to reveal an innate need for freedom, but to *create* a need for the 'pre-theoretical' sources of emancipatory desire upon which critical knowledge

³³ There are several excellent discussions of the difference between 'moral education', 'critical pedagogy', 'educated hope' and the 'education of desire', and I hence do not want to reiterate them here. I would rather like to explain how new movements in critical education are embedded in longer critical traditions that address issues of need, desire, will and hope, and in the history of the 'education of desire'.

³⁴ Joyce Canaan, for example, found that her 'students were considering the active subject position that engaging in critical hope entails, yet found reasons for rejecting it, hardly surprising in the TINA [There Is No Alternative] logic era' (2005: 89).

and transformative pedagogical practice are based (see also Browne 2005: 69). Discrepancies between social theory and the consciously lived experiences of individuals – elsewhere described as the ‘embarrassing fact’ that critical theory had lost its existential plausibility (Honneth 2007: 65) – are seen as the central challenge of education itself.³⁵ From this perspective, the task of pedagogy is to resolve the paradox of the ‘one-dimensionality’ of need and the paralysis of agency not (only) through *conscientization*, but also through the ‘education of desire’ and epistemological revolt.

There are several possible ways to disrupt one-dimensional thought. One is to attempt to convince others that an alternative view is valid and desirable by attempting to directly influence their existing emotional commitments and value orientations. In other words, we ‘redeem the normative validity claim directly by employing ethical arguments to sketch and defend the outlines of an alternative notion of the good life’ (Honneth 2007: 57). In this approach, debate is interpreted as the deliberate transformation of *desire* through rational and scientific persuasion. Throughout critical theory, this is generally regarded as the weakest, least effective and most analytically dubious approach to educating criticality. In another approach, these existing values and desires are ostensibly bracketed and the task is rather to *immanently disclose*, through critique and rhetorical device, the (inferior or inaccurate) interpretation of existing conditions. In this case, we ‘redeem the normative validity claim indirectly by giving such a radically new description of social reality as to alter our view of it fundamentally and change our value beliefs in the process’ (Honneth 2007: 57). This approach, epitomised by first and second-generation critical theory, has long been the dominant practice in critical pedagogy.

There is also a third approach to the education of desire which is grounded neither in moral education nor in immanent critique, but rather in critical speculation. This, according to Ruth Levitas (2005), is the function of utopia and the proper task of sociology itself. Objections may still be raised about the ontological status of the imagination, about how we can differentiate ‘critical’ from ‘uncritical’ utopias and ‘educated’ from ‘naïve’ hope; indeed, about the

³⁵ Browne (2005: 65) describes critical theory as combining ‘utopian projections with the explication of the needs of subjects that are unfulfilled and the empirical analysis of the developmental tendencies of capitalist society’, not a method to ‘juxtapose an ideal state against existing conditions of oppression and inequality’. It is, in this definition, a ‘synthesis of normative and empirical analysis to disclose change in the present that prefigure an emancipated or democratic society’.

epistemological criteria that we might use to distinguish desirable from undesirable visions of the future. However, if we assume that 'scientific predictability does not [necessarily] coincide with the futuristic mode in which the truth exists' (Marcuse 1989: 72), the paradox is less problematic. Honneth argues that the aim of a 'disclosing critique of society' such as the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is to 'change our value beliefs by evoking a new way of seeing the social world' (2007: 58), not to stake claim on objective truth. Its sole purpose is to create alternative ideational conditions 'under which a society conducts evaluative discourse on the ends of common action' (Honneth 2007: 58). This differs considerably from the truth-claims of classical critical pedagogy, which are grounded in more 'scientific' conceptions of ideology critique. It also departs from 'educated hope', which draws legitimacy from the possibility of rationally separating objectively 'true' from objectively 'false' forms of utopian imagination. In combination, therefore, world-disclosing critique and world-producing utopia point away from the traditional preoccupations of goal-oriented critical pedagogy and towards a more utopian philosophy of education.

Conclusion

Critical theorists have long believed that the possibility or impossibility of radical historical agency is both a political and a pedagogical problem. Rejecting both subjectivist and objectivist accounts of social change, they obstinately maintain that 'another world is possible' and that critical education has an important role to play in the process of creating it. However, they are deeply sceptical about the probability of radical social change on a grand scale, partly because of trenchant resistance to it, but also because they argue it can only occur if there are multiple and concurrent transformations: of existing material conditions, of 'the human heart', and of subjective needs, desires and inter-subjective relationships. This theory in particular is something that critical educators might bring more closely to home, as their work tends to presume the possibility of a division of political and intellectual labour. Lacking direct access to the material relations of production and often lacking organic connections to communities of struggle, critical educators tend to privilege (and sometimes overly so) the importance of analysis, critique and reflection in agency and social change.

In this context, 'critical hope' is both a state of mind and a relationship of power, and the pedagogy of hope aims to enable agency by demystifying power relations, humanizing social relations, training the utopian imagination and

educating need and desire. However, whilst this thesis is central to the normative foundations of critical theory, it also remains contested and paradoxical in pedagogical practice. On the one hand, it is argued that critical theory is justifiable only when it expresses the pre-existing repressed needs of the oppressed and enables them to employ this critical consciousness to motivate and inform practices of empowerment. In this view, pedagogy is a relatively straightforward practice of nurturing, disciplining and legitimizing emergent political sentiment and action. Pedagogies of hope in this context are processes of education that make existing or potential possibilities within society visible where they are obscured by intellectual habits of determinism, fatalism, ignorance and fear. Here, pedagogy is understood as an important 'rational' dimension of political action; to speak of educating critical hope in this context is to refer either to the demystification of 'false consciousness', or to disciplining or making more 'scientific' the pre-existing needs, desires or longings for emancipation and change so that they do not become ideological, fanatical or un-reflexive.

On the other hand, however, it is also argued that human needs and desires are social constructions and hence themselves not necessarily reliable indicators of objective oppression. In fact, it is presumed that one of the greatest indications of generalised oppression in post-modern capitalist societies is the absence of the subjective desire for universal human needs such as peace, freedom and justice, either for oneself or for others. In other words, gross levels of apathy and indifference to the damaging consequences of capitalist relations – epitomised by the contemporary 'crisis of hope' – are interpreted as signs that the most fundamental instincts of human beings have been colonized by this logic. Under such conditions, critical theory aims not to theorize pre-existing needs for change, but rather to 'work on consciousness' to create the desire for change by reconstructing or 'recognizing' existing conditions as being antithetical to these universal (or universally desirable) human needs. Here, pedagogy is seen as *prior* to political agency and education is ascribed a central role in motivating social action. In this context, the definition of 'critical hope' shifts, so that criticality is not simply an ability to recognize injustice, but also to be 'moved to change it' (Burbules and Berk 1999: 50). Critical theory hence accepts a more affective remit, stretching beneath rational problems of structure and agency into the emotional and psychological dispositions that are seen to underlie them. This shift represents a migration from traditional 'pedagogies of hope' towards alternative traditions in the 'education of desire', and indeed, towards some of the most under-developed problematics in critical theory itself.

The tension which inheres between these two perspectives of the relationship between human subjectivity and social change, or pedagogy and practice, is often seen as a paralysing paradox: Marcuse articulated it and then proceeded to be vexed by it, while Adorno (1967) essentially abandoned hope in the possibility of large-scale revolution of social relations but concluded that 'education and enlightenment might manage a little something' to help individuals recognize and resist incivility and domination. Critical educators, on the other hand, argue that pedagogy has a considerably more significant role to play in transforming the subjective conditions of personal transcendence, political struggle and the creation of new types of inter-subjective ethics. However, very few critical theorists have actually concentrated on theorising the pedagogical dimensions of social change, instead leaving this largely to 'pedagogues' who often by dint of circumstance embed their theory-work in the narrow context of specific educational practices.³⁶

What is most needed now, therefore, is a set of conceptual tools which allows us to theorize the complex relationship between the social constitution of human subjectivity and the possibility of social change – a new theory of the relationship between pedagogical politics and political pedagogy – a post-modern critical theory that shies away from neither human anthropology nor the philosophy of knowledge – which takes the experienced impotence of the 'crisis of hope' as an 'active ingredient' in its own thinking and acting – which recognizes educational and emotional transcendence as integral but not isolated practices of social transformation. What is needed, in short, is the broadening of new critical theories that enable us to understand the possibility of possibility in post-modern capitalist societies, and that educate the obstinacy of critical-utopian hope that is required for this difficult project.

³⁶ Notable exceptions to this include Henry Giroux, Douglas Kellner, Ilan Gur-Ze'ev and Peter McLaren.

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